[Book review of:] The Writings of Luke and the Jewish Roots of the Christian Way: An Examination of the Aims of the First Christian Historian in the Light of Ancient Politics, Ethnography, and Historiography. By J. Andrew Cowan

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The Writings of Luke and the Jewish Roots of the Christian Way: An Examination of the Aims of the First Christian Historian in the Light of Ancient Politics, Ethnography, and Historiography. By J. ANDREW COWAN. Pp. xvi + 209. (The Library of New Testament Studies, 599.) London and New York: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2019. ISBN 978 0 567 68405 9, 68401 1, and 68404 2. Hardback $102.60; e-book $82.08; e-PDF $82.08.

ACCORDING to what has developed into a majority position over the past 40 years, the author of Luke-Acts presents the early Christian movement as rooted in ancient Judaism to convince readers of its age-old and *therefore* respected heritage. He thereby attempts to convince the authorities that Christians deserve the same rights, privileges, and protections as the Jews and/or to gain cultural respect. The underlying question of this doctoral dissertation, supervised by N. T. Wright (St Andrews), is how this so-called argument of antiquity ('the old is good') works, if at all, in the case of Luke-Acts.

Building on the critical work of P. Philhofer, *PRESBYTERON KREITTON* (Tübingen, 1990) and S. Wendel, *Scriptural Interpretation and Community Self-Definition* (Leiden, 2011), Cowan argues that there is a need for more precision: how and why would the author of Acts take recourse to the argument of antiquity, where the Lukan Jesus stresses the incompatibility of the old with the new (Luke 5:36–9) and the Lukan Paul suggest that his message is a *novum* because of Jesus's resurrection (Acts 17:30–1)? This also relates in part to the question of genre and the intended readers. To whom is the argument addressed? To the Roman authorities? They were not likely to read or to be persuaded by the argument. To answer these questions, Cowan reviews the evidence of Luke's work in comparison with the, at first sight, broadly similar concerns in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Josephus, two near-contemporary historians.

In the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (pp. 25–56), the argument of antiquity—which is often explicitly mentioned—serves to stress the ancient Greek roots of the Roman people and their present superiority to other peoples. According to Dionysius, the first Romans were of Greek ancestry, the culture of Rome (its customs, laws, and religious practices) was typically Greek, and Rome's constitution and laws were even superior to many Greek cities. For Dionysius, the Romans as a whole were a

Greek people. Here Cowan signals a telling asymmetry with the early Christian movement as described in Acts: the Christian movement was not an exclusively Jewish movement. In Dionysius, it was not antiquity in itself that would gain respect, but antiquity *and proven virtue*: 'A long history of virtue carried a great deal of symbolic cultural capital, but a long history of barbarism would hardly have impressed' (p. 55). In Luke-Acts, the Jewish people are more often contrasted with the early church: their past is a past of rebellion (Acts 7 and 13).

Cowan suggests that in the works of Josephus (pp. 57–99) the argument of the antiquity of the Jewish people functions in a similar way as in Dionysius. In fact, he argues that Josephus took Dionysius's *Antiquities* most likely as a direct model. As in Dionysius, Josephus speaks openly about the virtuous past of the Jewish people as typical of the Jewish people throughout history, to strengthen the superiority of its laws and constitutions and its cultural respectability in the Greco-Roman environment.

In Luke-Acts (pp. 101–66), so runs the argument of Cowan, the argument of antiquity works in a substantially different way. In Luke-Acts, the Christian message is something new, a new development in God's history with the Jewish people. References to the past are often quite negative, as in the speeches in Acts 7 and 13, which stress the persistent disobedience of the people. The continuity with the past lies not in the virtue of the people but in the divine plan of salvation and the fulfilment of the divine promises. The coming of Jesus means something new, albeit in fulfilment of the ancient prophecies: 'Luke's emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy is probably an apologetic response to the broad rejection of the Christian message by the Jewish people' (p. 165). Luke's purpose is 'to reassure Christians that the events that have taken place in the life of Jesus and the early church are legitimate developments within God's salvific plan' (p. 169). In sum, Cowan argues that 'Luke highlights this connection not in order to provide the church with a means to bolster its position in Greco-Roman society but rather in order to reassure Christians about the legitimacy of the claim that God's promises of salvation have come to fulfillment through the events of the life of Jesus and the early church' (p. 169).

Given Luke's competence to hit two birds with one stone, as in the Areopagus speech where a single argument makes sense to both Jewish and Gentile readers albeit in two different ways, one can ask why Luke would not have it both ways with the argument of antiquity as well, targeting a mixed audience: would not a

converted Roman official be impressed by the good examples of the Jewish past (as, e.g., implied in Luke 1–2) *and* appreciate the newness of the Christian message?

All in all, to end with a cliché but a true and appropriate one, this is a carefully researched and balanced study that is unlikely to have spoken the last word on the issue, but that needs to be taken into account as a serious contribution by future researchers of Luke-Acts.

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